

The Formative Values of Decorative Arts in the Development of Transversal Competencies: Modern Educational Perspectives

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ABSTRACT: This paper analyzes the formative values of decorative arts in the contemporary educational context, highlighting how they contribute to the development of transversal competencies essential for the 21st century. Decorative art is no longer viewed solely through the lens of its utilitarian function, but becomes a complex pedagogical tool that emphasizes the details necessary for a harmonious psychological climate and for the development of aesthetic taste. The study demonstrates that practical activities such as modeling, ceramics, or tapestry act as catalysts for fine motor skills and coordination, having a direct impact on brain development at early ages. Beyond the motor aspect, the artistic process cultivates fundamental character traits such as patience, perseverance, and attention to detail, teaching students to manage frustration and transform mistakes into learning opportunities. The integration of decorative arts into the curriculum, through modern approaches such as project-based learning (PBL) and STEAM education, facilitates the decompartmentalization of disciplines and the formation of transferable skills in critical thinking and creativity. Creativity is defined in this context as “the seed of innovation,” being the main leadership competence required on today’s labor market. At the same time, the paper emphasizes the importance of collaboration and communication within collective artistic projects, where students learn to negotiate roles and assume responsibility for a shared final product. In conclusion, decorative arts represent a discovery-based learning environment that transforms education from a simple accumulation of theoretical knowledge into a process of self-knowledge and human emancipation.

KEYWORDS: Decorative art; transversal competencies; creativity; aesthetic education; interdisciplinarity; STEAM; critical thinking; fine motor skills;

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Introduction

Decorative art occupies a fundamental place in the contemporary environment, contributing significantly to the enhancement of the details required for a harmonious interior and to the creation of a healthy psychological climate. Beyond its aesthetic dimension, this field — which includes ceramics, textiles (tapestry, embroidery, and printed fabrics), artistic glass, and ornamental design — functions as a complex pedagogical instrument in the development of personality.

Within the context of modern education, the focus has shifted from the simple memorization of information toward the development of transversal competences (Lungu, n.d), which are essential for adapting to the rapid transformations of contemporary society and the labor market. Competence can be defined as an integrated system of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that students mobilize in order to solve real-life problems.

Transversal competences such as critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, and autonomy represent priorities within European educational policies, as they contribute to the formation of an adaptable workforce and encourage active participation in democratic processes. Decorative arts provide a discovery-based learning framework that rekindles students' motivation and transforms the school from a space dedicated to the transmission of ready-made knowledge into an environment that promotes active exploration and experiential learning.

The Conceptual Framework of Aesthetic and Artistic Education

Aesthetic education (Rusu, n.d) represents the process of shaping personality through the experience and understanding of beauty found in nature, society, and art. Its main objective is the development of sensitivity and a general receptiveness toward the surrounding world. Although closely related, artistic education has a more specific scope, operating strictly within the sphere of artistic values (literature, music, and visual arts) in order to cultivate profound creative capacities.

In primary education, this formative process begins with sensory and perceptual training and gradually evolves toward the decoding and understanding of the symbolic language of artworks. Historically, decorative arts originated from essential practical needs – such as protecting the human body through textiles or preserving food in clay vessels – but they quickly evolved toward a synthesis between utilitarian purpose and spiritual expression.

This duality is essential in education, as students learn that an object should not only fulfill a functional role but also create a visual and tactile balance. The materials used, whether organic (such as wool or stone) or artificial (such as glass or plastic), generate different psychological responses and stimulate both visual and tactile perception. Consequently, through the study of decorative arts, the child does not merely produce

objects but gradually builds their own artistic and aesthetic culture (Gînju, 2022), becoming a *homo aestheticus* capable of understanding and experiencing life through the perspective of cultural values.

The Development of Critical Thinking and Creativity (Aspect 1)

Critical thinking (Cottrell, 2005) is frequently and incorrectly perceived as a “difficult” activity or as one limited exclusively to the academic environment. In reality, it represents a cognitive process through which facts are examined, analyzed, and interpreted in order to formulate well-grounded conclusions. Within the field of decorative arts, critical thinking (Şofron, 2010) is continuously exercised through the necessity of evaluating different options: selecting appropriate materials, choosing techniques that ensure durability (such as riveting or welding), and identifying optimal chromatic solutions that contribute to the compositional balance of the artwork.

The student does not merely execute technical operations mechanically but reflects on their choices, transforming the technical process into an exercise in logical reasoning and argumentation. Furthermore, creativity, is currently regarded as one of the most important leadership competencies. It should not be understood as a talent exclusive to artists, but rather as a capacity that can be systematically cultivated and developed through education.

Artistic education encourages exploratory behaviors and free, non-punitive forms of expression, offering students the autonomy required to move beyond previously established patterns of thinking. Decorative arts, through techniques such as batik or abstract tapestry, allow students to experiment with nonfigurative forms, fostering a mindset capable of identifying original solutions in situations where others perceive only obstacles. A contemporary educational strategy that supports this process is Design Thinking, which trains students to address real-world problems through empathy, creativity, experimentation, and iterative testing.

Interdisciplinarity and the Integrated Approach (Aspect 2)

Contemporary education increasingly promotes the transition from monodisciplinary approaches to interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary models, thereby overcoming the rigid boundaries traditionally separating school subjects. One of the most representative educational frameworks in this direction is STEAM education, which integrates the arts with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics in order to encourage holistic and innovative learning experiences.

Decorative arts (Spînu, 2019) represent an ideal field of convergence for such interdisciplinary connections. For instance, the creation of a ceramic object requires knowledge related to the chemistry of materials and the physics of the firing process, while textile design often relies on mathematical principles such as geometry, rhythm,

and symmetry. Another essential pedagogical approach in this context is Project-Based Learning (PBL). This method positions the student as an active participant in their own learning process, challenging them to solve authentic problems by designing and producing a concrete final product.

For example, a fashion design project or the creation of a collaborative decorative panel requires students to work cooperatively, manage time and resources effectively, and establish meaningful connections between theoretical knowledge and practical application. At the same time, the integration of modern technologies—such as virtual reality (VR) and 3D modeling—within the study of art history enables the virtual reconstruction of cultural heritage, offering immersive learning experiences that connect artistic, technological, and historical perspectives.

The Role of Decorative Arts in the Development of Practical and Social Skills

The creation of objects from materials such as clay, textile fibers, or glass has a significant impact on the development of fine motor skills. This capacity for coordination, precision, and control is essential for cognitive and neurological development, as manual activities involve a substantial part of the cerebral cortex.

Students who develop manual dexterity through modeling, textile techniques, or decorative drawing often demonstrate improved memory, concentration, and the ability to use a more complex and structured language. Beyond their aesthetic dimension, decorative arts contribute to the cultivation of fundamental character traits:

- Patience and perseverance are essential qualities fostered through artistic practice. The creative process is rarely instantaneous; activities such as weaving, ceramic firing, or textile sewing require time, attention, and sustained effort. Students also learn to manage frustration and transform mistakes into opportunities for reflection and improvement.
- Another important dimension is collaboration. Collective artistic projects, including murals, decorative installations, or public space interventions, encourage negotiation of ideas, responsibility for shared outcomes, and respect for diverse perspectives. Such experiences reduce conflict and strengthen the sense of belonging within the school community.
- Communication skills are also developed through the presentation and interpretation of artistic works. Students learn to articulate aesthetic choices, employ specialized vocabulary, and express personal ideas in a clear and structured manner.

Furthermore, decorative arts possess a significant therapeutic and formative value, supporting self-knowledge and emotional regulation. Artistic activities are particularly effective when working with students who experience social marginalization or learning

difficulties, as they provide alternative forms of expression and enhance self-confidence, thereby contributing to improved academic engagement.

Conclusions

In conclusion, decorative arts (Spînu, 2019) represent far more than simple activities of embellishment or manual practice; they function as complex educational tools that contribute to the holistic development of the individual. Their integration into the contemporary educational curriculum facilitates the development of essential transversal competencies (Lungu, n.d), including creativity, critical thinking (Cottrell, 2005), perseverance, and social interaction skills.

Within current educational paradigms (Bucur, n.d.), such as STEAM education and project-based learning, decorative arts acquire an increasingly relevant role in preparing students to become adaptable, reflective, and creative individuals in a rapidly changing society.

Therefore, the educational system should recognize and promote the formative potential of decorative arts, transforming the learning process into an authentic experience of personal and intellectual development. In this context, students are encouraged not only to understand what to learn and how to learn, but also why knowledge and creativity are fundamental for their personal and social development.

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